

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan and proposed Critical Habitat

Clark Fork River Recovery Unit (CHAPTER 3)

What areas are included in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit?

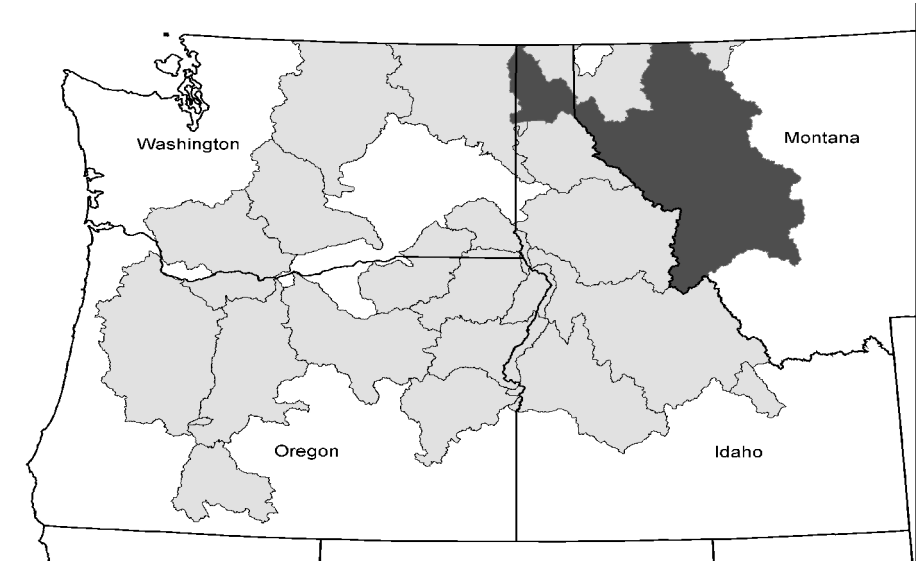
The Clark Fork Recovery Unit is the largest and one of the most diverse recovery units; including Flathead Lake and most of western Montana, as well as Lake Pend Oreille, Priest Lake and much of the northern Idaho panhandle. Four recovery subunits (Upper Clark Fork, Lower Clark Fork, Flathead, and Priest) include 38 existing core areas and about 150 currently identified local populations.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat? Proposed critical habitat in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit includes 3,372 miles of streams (about 11 percent of the total stream miles in the drainage found on 1:100,000 series map coverage) and 304,225 acres of lakes and reservoirs.

Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout range-wide was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans.

In the Clark Fork Recovery Unit four separate recovery subunit teams were



convened for the Upper Clark Fork, Lower Clark Fork, Flathead, and Priest subunits. Plans were built upon the foundation established by previous State bull trout planning efforts in Montana and Idaho.

The recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery and critical habitat proposal are closely linked.

The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat

proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of the species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals would be involved only if they are taking voluntary actions to benefit bull trout.

Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7

interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and

considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit?

Bull trout remain widely distributed throughout the Clark Fork River Basin in most of the major drainages where they historically occurred. However, many populations have become fragmented and some formerly connected local populations are now isolated. The naturally patchy distribution of this species has been further eroded.

Declining distribution and abundance has been due in large measure to disruption of historical connectivity, particularly within mainstem river corridors. Variable current trends in population abundance in the 38 bull trout core areas have been observed, although for many populations we lack a sufficient history or intensity of

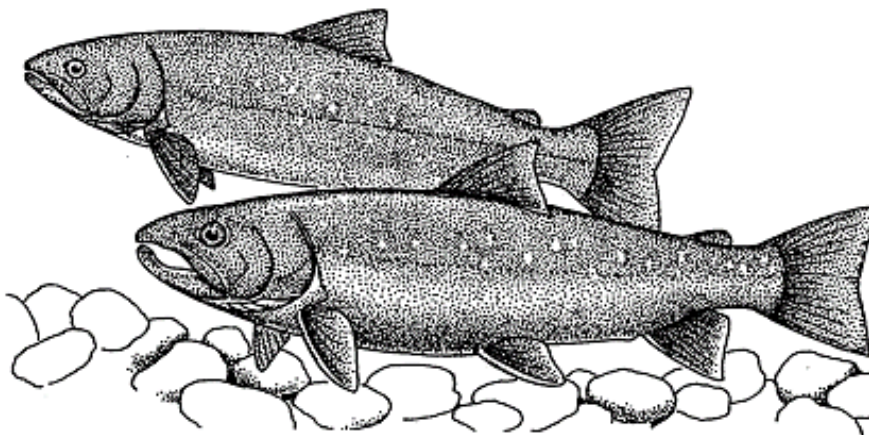
monitoring to accurately determine population trends.

While the Clark Fork River Recovery Unit remains one of the relative strongholds of bull trout within their U.S. range, most migratory populations of fluvial and adfluvial bull trout have been seriously depleted and considerable impediments to recovery still exist.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit?

Large hydroelectric dams, erected on the mainstem Clark Fork River 50-100 years ago, were the catalyst for much of the historical disruption of the migratory corridor. The legacy of late 1800's and early 1900's mining in the upper Clark Fork eradicated all fish from substantial portions of the upper drainage. Seasonal water temperature increases and dewatering, primarily associated with agricultural diversions, remain problematic in many drainages. Continuing widespread habitat impacts from historical forestry and road building practices as well as highway and railroad construction and agricultural conversion of riparian areas continue to affect bull trout. More localized problems result from livestock grazing and urban sprawl along some streams.

Fishery management conflicts occur with nonnative sport fish species in many waters. Hybridization and competition from brook trout in



streams, and incompatibility with introduced lake trout in nearly all the large lakes in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit are major obstacles to bull trout recovery.

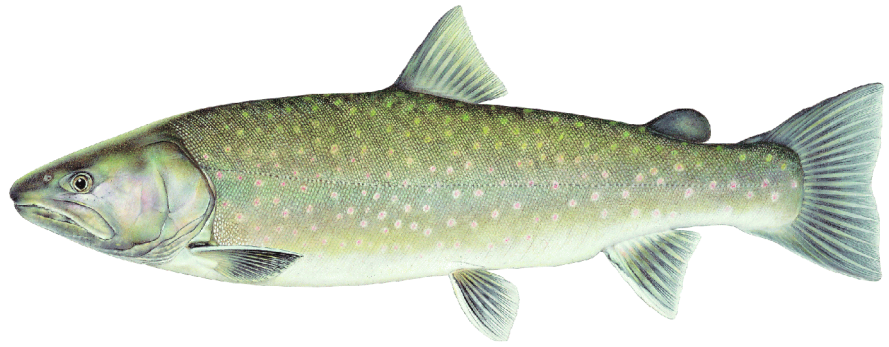
What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex, interacting groups of bull trout distributed throughout the species' native range so that the species can be de-listed. Specifically, the four Clark Fork recovery subunit teams (Upper Clark Fork, Lower Clark Fork, Flathead, and Priest) adopted the goal of a sustained net increase in bull trout abundance and increased distribution of some local populations within existing core areas in this recovery unit.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

The following have been designated as primary core areas under recovered conditions in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit: the upper Clark Fork River, Rock Creek, Blackfoot River, Bitterroot River, lower Clark Fork River, Lake Pend Oreille, Priest Lakes and Priest River, Flathead Lake, Swan Lake, and Hungry Horse Reservoir. Twenty-four smaller discrete bull trout core areas were designated as secondary core areas, based primarily on size, not relative importance.



Distribution criteria will be met when the total number of identified local populations (currently numbering about 150) has been maintained or increased and when local populations remain broadly distributed in all existing core areas.

Abundance criteria will be met when, in all 10 primary core areas, each of at least 5 local populations contains more than 100 adult bull trout. In the Lake Pend Oreille core area, each of at least 6 local populations must contain more than 100 adult bull trout. In the Flathead Lake core area, each of at least 10 local populations must contain more than 100 adult bull trout.

In each of the 10 primary core areas, the total adult bull trout abundance, distributed among local populations, must exceed 1,000 fish, and adult bull trout abundance must exceed 2,500 adult bull trout in Lake Pend Oreille, Flathead Lake, and Swan Lake.

The abundance criteria for 24 secondary core areas will be met when each core area with the habitat capacity to do so supports at least one local population containing more than 100 adult bull trout and when total adult abundance in the secondary core areas collectively exceeds 2,400

fish.

Trend criteria will be met when the overall bull trout population in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit is accepted, under contemporary standards of the time, as stable or increasing, based on at least 10 years of monitoring data.

Connectivity criteria will be met when functional fish passage is restored or determined to be unnecessary to support bull trout recovery at Milltown, Thompson Falls, Noxon Rapids, Cabinet Gorge, and Priest Lake Dams and when dam operational issues are satisfactorily addressed at Hungry Horse, Bigfork, Kerr, and Albeni Falls Dams.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit?

Generally, the strategy for recovery consists of protecting, restoring, and maintaining suitable habitat conditions for bull trout and dealing with nonnative fish impacts and fishery management concerns. This will include identifying fish passage barriers and implementing tasks to provide free movement from spawning and rearing tributaries to foraging, migrating and overwintering habitat in the larger rivers and lakes, especially in the Clark Fork River corridor. In portions of the drainage water quality and water quantity must be improved to restore the clean, cold

water that bull trout require.

Populations of nonnative lake trout, brook trout, and other species that directly conflict or compete with bull trout may need to be reduced in some waters and fishery management actions may require changing the species emphasis to favor bull trout.

More details are available in the full text of the Clark Fork River Recovery Unit (Chapter 3 of the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan).

How long will recovery take?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout. In the Clark Fork Recovery Unit, the current status of bull trout is better than in many other portions of the range, but a tremendous amount of work remains to be done to reconnect and restore impaired habitat and to cope with threats from nonnative species. It may be 3 to 5 bull trout generations (15 to 25 years), or possibly longer, before significant reductions can be made in the identified threats to the species and bull trout can be considered eligible for de-listing.

How much will recovery cost?

Total cost of bull trout recovery in the Clark Fork Recovery Unit is estimated at \$71.9 million spread over a 25-year recovery period. Total cost includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State, and Federal governments and by private businesses and individuals. These costs are attributed to bull trout conservation, but other aquatic species will also benefit. Cost estimates are not provided for tasks which are normal agency responsibilities under existing authorities.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout>.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days until February 27, 2003.

Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, attn: Robert Ruesink, Supervisor, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days until January 28, 2003.

Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

FORMAL HEARINGS and PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS

Two public information meetings and formal hearings to take testimony are scheduled. The information meetings will be from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The formal public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. as follows:

January 7, 2003 - Polson, MT
KwaTaqNuk Resort
303 U.S. Hwy 93.

January 9, 2003 - Spokane, WA
West Coast Grand Hotel
303 West North River Drive

Four additional public information meetings and open houses are scheduled. Written comments may be submitted at any of these:

January 8, 2003 - Missoula MT
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Road (3pm-7pm)

January 14, 2003 - Kalispell MT
Montana Fish Wildlife, and Parks
490 N. Meridian Road (3pm-7pm)

January 15, 2003 - Sandpoint ID
City Forum; 418 N. 3rd Ave (6 pm - 8 pm)

January 16, 2003 - Libby MT
Kootenai National Forest Hqtrs,
1101 Highway 2 West (3pm-7pm)

This is only a brief summary.

*Please see full draft recovery plan
and critical habitat proposal for
complete details.*